

## **HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

Fiscal Year 2004

The office of the Human Rights Director in conjunction with the Human Rights Commission reaffirms and continues its mission to promote justice for all citizens through means of education and enforcement of local and federal civil rights laws.

This has been a productive, busy, and historic year for the Human Rights Commission in Amherst. The Human Rights Bylaw for a 7-member commission was changed to a 9-member commission and was approved by the Attorney General's Office. Two high school students were appointed to the Commission. And the HRC held its first all-day retreat on May 1, 2004.

The Director has been busy, responding to over 25 complaints from citizens and Town employees. Most of the issues were resolved and none resulted in a formal investigation. On average, 10-15 calls were received per week concerning issues of alleged civil rights violations, general inquiries, and other administrative issues. The Director conducted an investigation of employee discontent at the Wastewater Treatment Plant, and recommendations were made. The Director serves as chair of the newly formed Town's BAMSS (Becoming a Multicultural School System) Group.

The Director and the Chair of the HRC met with Jill Armstrong, Coordinator, Anti-Defamation League "No Place for Hate" Project, to initiate Amherst becoming a "No Place for Hate" town. The HRC presented its "No Place for Hate" campaign in June at the Annual Community Potluck Feast by honoring 10 students from the Amherst Schools with their first "No Place for Hate" award. This event was in collaboration with the NAACP and the Amherst Schools Study Circles.

The HRC met with the New Superintendent of Amherst Schools, Jere Hochman, for the purpose of discussing an alliance with the schools to include Human Rights Studies in their curriculum.

The HRC has begun collaborating with other organizations and Human Rights Commissions. The Commission has developed a liaison with the Northampton HRC, to which Rafael Sanchez Lopez, is the liaison for the Commission. He attends their meetings on a regular basis. In April the two commissions co-sponsored a forum on Same Sex Marriages. On May 17<sup>th</sup> the HRC, along with the Health Department and Leisure Services, organized a celebration of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court decision to legalize same sex marriages.

The Commission co-sponsored and participated in the March on Poverty.

The HRC co-sponsored a two-day workshop with Greenfield Community College on the Patriot Act and Civil Liberties. The Commission participated with SAGE in the Fourth of July Parade. Jointly with Amnesty International, the HRC presented its annual candle light vigil and a reading of the Declaration of Human Rights. The HRC recognized March 31<sup>st</sup> as International Day to Eliminate Racial Discrimination by presenting a reading on the Common. On May 17<sup>th</sup> the HRC supported our High School Commissioners to present a week long program on Brown vs. the Board of Education, to illustrate the impact this decision made on society.

The HRC supported the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride Forum at the Jones Library.

The HRC hosted a group of educators from the Republic of Georgia (in the former Soviet Union) on behalf of the Institute for Training and Development.

In June, the HRC wrote the Chancellor of the University of Massachusetts in support of international students not having to pay a fee of \$65 per semester, part of which would go toward implementing the (SEVIS) Student Exchange Visitor Information System and the US Patriot Act. The SEVIS system is a regressive surveillance database that compromises our values of freedom and civil liberties.

Joseph Wronka, one of the Human Rights Commissioners, was the keynote speaker at the Second International Conference on Self-Determination in Geneva, Switzerland in August 2004.

The Human Rights Director thanks the Commission for all its support and for the many hours they have put into making this commission move forward toward Amherst becoming a “No Place for Hate” town, and a place of inclusion and respect for all its citizens.

The Commission appreciates all the support it receives from our Town Government.

Respectfully submitted,

Eunice Torres, Human Rights Director  
Reynolds Winslow, Chair Amherst Human Rights Commission